Exploring the Eighth Primary School Graders' Attainment in English as a Foreign Language

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2013

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:096165

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-03-19**

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Exploring the Eighth Primary School Graders' Attainment in English as a Foreign Language

Diploma Paper

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Osijek, March, 2013

Table of contents

Summary…….. 3

Sažetak ……4

1. Introduction…… 5
2. Theoretical Background
   2.1. What is second language acquisition? 5
   2.2. Interlanguage…….6
   2.3. Error analysis……7
3. Language competences
   3.1. Communicative competence…… 10
   3.2. Grammatical competence……..12
4. Assessing and Evaluating Grammatical Competence……13
   4.1. Grammar test tasks…… 15
5. Exploring the eighth primary school graders' attainment in English as a foreign language……. 16
   5.1. Aims of the study…….. 18
   5.2. Participants…… 19
   5.3. Instruments…… 20
   5.4. Procedure……... 21
   5.5. Results…… 21
6. Error analysis…….. 25
   6.1. Erroneous usage and formation of verb structures…… 28
   6.2. Erroneous usage and formation of other grammatical structures…….. 32
7. Discussion……... 34
8. Conclusion…….. 35
9. Bibliography……... 37
10. Appendix 1- Test …… 39
11. Appendix 2- Test results for particular tenses……... 42
12. Appendix 3- Erroneous usage of tenses…….. 44

Summary

Language competence refers to knowledge of and ability to use language resources to form well-structured messages. Grammatical competence is one part of language competence. The eighth graders of Croatian primary schools are expected to have reached A2 level according to the Common European Framework (CEFR) and Croatian National Educational Standard ("Hrvatski nacionalni obrazovni standard") (HNOS) for this age group.

The results of the study that attempted to investigate the eighth primary school graders' attainment in English as a foreign language have shown that the learners have done better at the receptive than at the productive level. The pupils had difficulties with particular tenses and some other grammatical structures. The pupils' marks in English do not always correspond to the success achieved on the test. Most of the pupils in the eighth grade of primary school have reached A2 level of CEFR.

Keywords: foreign language acquisition, grammatical competence, A2 level, receptive knowledge, productive knowledge, error analysis

Sažetak

Jezična kompetencija podrazumijeva znati i moći koristiti se jezičnim fondom i zakonitostima s ciljem prenošenja dobro strukturiranih poruka. Gramatička jezična kompetencija je dio cjelovite jezične kompetencije. Prema Zajedničkom europskom referentnom okviru i Hrvatskom nacionalnom obrazovnom standardu od učenika osnovnih škola u Hrvatskoj očekuje se postignuta A2 razina na kraju osmoga razreda.

Rezultati istraživanja koje je imalo za cilj istražiti usvojenost gramatičkih struktura engleskoga jezika na kraju osmoga razreda pokazali su da je receptivno znanje učenika veće od produktivnoga. Učenici su imali poteškoća s pojedinim glagolskim vremenima i strukturama. Ocjene učenika iz predmeta engleski jezik u nekim slučajevima se ne podudaraju s postignutim rezultatima na testu. Većina učenika osmih razreda dosegla je očekivanu A2 razinu.

Ključne riječi: usvajanje drugog jezika, gramatička kompetencija, razina A2, receptivno znanje, produktivno znanje, analiza pogrešaka

1. Introduction

Second language acquisition, as a process leading towards the ability to use the second language, has been studied for several decades. There has also been some research that focuses on the acquisition of grammar by a particular age group of learners, but there has not been a study on how much the pupils in Croatia have acquired at the end of their primary education.

This paper is an attempt to explore the eighth primary school graders' attainment in English as a foreign language, and their estimation of success in the acquisition of grammar. The first, theoretical, part of the paper focuses on what the second language acquisition is and what some of the theories in SLA are and how they have been applied to research. It also provides an insight into what language competences are, what the communicative competence is and how the different levels of language competence are described. The second part is the practical part of the study in which the methodology and the results of research conducted in two primary schools in Osijek and Darda are described.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. What is second language acquisition?

Many researchers have tried to answer the questions what acquisition is and how to observe what has been acquired. These questions have been treated in many different ways in the past. If the second language learner produces a correct utterance or even several correct utterances of a particular structure, it does not have to mean that it has been acquired. There is a possibility that a learner will "backslide". It means that the correct structures appear but then seem to disappear. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether or when a certain structure has been acquired.

The definition of acquisition might range from linguistic knowledge to the ability to use that knowledge in speech and the ability to process language in real time. The studies conducted by Hakuta and Mackey as cited and by Gass and Selinker (2008) show that there are different definitions of acquisition of a form:

> "(a) the first appearance of a correct form, (b) a certain percentage of accurate forms (e.g., 90%), (c) the first of three consecutive two-week samples in which the morpheme is supplied in over 90% of obligatory contexts and (d) the presence of at least two examples of structures in *two* different posttests" (Gass and Selinker, 2008: 81).

However, one cannot draw conclusions only looking at the language forms. The context in which the forms occur is also very important.

To sum up, many researchers have used a variety of criteria to determine when second language data acquisition has taken place, but the factor of emergence should also be taken into consideration. “It is not just the point at which something is acquired that is of interest, but it is also important to consider the stages that a learner goes through in acquiring a particular form” (Gass and Selinker, 2008: 82).

2.2. Interlanguage

One should be aware that second language learning is a creative process in which learners acquire the new language by examining hypotheses about the target language. They base them upon different sources of knowledge: “limited knowledge of the target language itself, knowledge about the native language, knowledge about the communicative function of language, knowledge about language in general, and knowledge about life, human beings, and the universe” (Brown, 1987: 168). Thus, learners construct a language of their own as one of the phases towards acquiring the target language. This language has become known as “interlanguage” and the term was coined by Selinker in 1972. “Interlanguage refers to the separateness of a second language learner’s system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages” (Brown, 1987: 169).

When analyzing interlanguage, the scholars mostly focus on the production data, because it is observable and presumably shows a learner’s competence. It is more difficult to study comprehension of the second language because it cannot be so easily discerned. According to Brown (1987), the study of interlanguage concentrates on the speech and writing of learners and is mostly the study of errors made by learners since

the correct production gives little information about the actual interlanguage system of learners.

It is important to make the distinction between mistakes and errors. Mistakes are explained as performance errors that are more like lapses, which are not necessarily the consequence of lacking the language competence but the result of occasional insecurities in the production of language. According to Brown (1987) these might be slips of the tongue, some ungrammaticalities or hesitations when speaking or writing and they occur with the native speakers as well. Corder (1974) uses the term 'non-systematic errors' (or 'errors of performance') instead of mistakes and he stresses that "we are normally immediately aware of them when they occur and can correct them with more or less complete assurance" (Richards, 1974: 24). On the other hand, errors are "idiosyncrasies in the interlanguage of the learner which are direct manifestations of a system within which a learner is operating at the time" (Brown, 1987: 170). Some authors (Corder, as cited in Richards, 1974) call these 'systematic errors' (or 'errors of competence') and they reveal the learners' "underlying knowledge of the language to date, or, as we may call it his *transitional competence*".

2.3. Error analysis

Since learners' errors can be observed, analyzed and classified, they show what might be the system operating within the learner. This led to the study of learners' errors, called *error analysis*.

According to Gass and Selinker (2008) error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that puts emphasis on the errors learners make. It starts from the learner production data and it compares the errors a learner makes in producing the target language.

Errors are important in three different ways. They are important to the teachers because they tell them in which phase of the learning process the learner is and what their style to learn is. Teachers' attitudes towards their pupils' errors have varied at different periods. According to Michaelides (1990), a few decades ago they were still considered a "crime" and the pupils were punished for them, instead of being helped to correct them.

Once the researchers started to analyse the learners' errors more thoroughly, the teachers started to treat the learners' errors and foreign language learning in almost completely different way. Secondly, errors are significant to the researcher as they show "how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language" (Richards, 1974: 25). Finally, they are valuable to the learners themselves since they help them to learn. "It is a way the learner has of testing his hypotheses about the nature of the language he is learning" (Richards, 1974: 25).

Gass and Selinker (2008) suggested that a researcher should follow six main steps of errors analysis. These are:

> "1 *Collect data*. Although this is typically done with written data, oral data can also serve as a base.
>
> 2 *Identify errors*. What is the error (e.g., incorrect sequence of tenses, wrong verb form, singular verb form with plural subject)?
>
> 3 *Classify errors*. Is it an error of agreement? Is it an error in irregular verbs?
>
> 4 *Quantify errors*. How many errors of agreement occur? How many irregular verb form errors occur?
>
> 5 *Analyze source*.
>
> 6 *Remediate*. Based on the kind and frequency of an error type, pedagogical intervention is carried out" (Gass and Selinker, 2008: 103)

When analyzing errors, first it is important to identify and describe them. In 1971 Corder provided a model for identifying erroneous or idiosyncratic utterances in a second language. He distinguishes between 'overt' and 'covert' errors. Overt errors are ungrammatical at the sentence level, while covert errors are grammatically correct at the sentence level, but cannot be interpreted within the context of communication. Therefore, they can be also called 'sentence level' and 'discourse level' errors (Brown, 1987: 173).

It is also important to understand what the causes and sources of learners' errors are. The sources are usually listed as the following: interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer and context of learning. In addition to these, the errors may occur because of different communication strategies the learners use (Brown, 1987).

The first source of errors is mother-tongue interference which is referred to as interlingual transfer. “Before the system of the second language is familiar, the native language is the only linguistic system in previous experience upon which the learner can draw“ (Brown, 1987: 177). This interference of the first language mostly occurs in the translation exercises. Another influence on the second language learning might be from the learning of a third language, especially if the second and the third languages are closely related.

Another source of error is interference from the target language and the number of errors of this type seems to increase in the “transitional dialect” (Corder, as cited in Michealides, 1990: 29) or “interlanguage” which denotes the unstable nature of the foreign learners’ “idiosyncratic dialect” at this stage” (Selinker, as cited in Michealides, 1990: 29). Most researchers think that this intralingual transfer is a major factor in second language learning. The most significant characteristic of the negative interlingual transfer or overgeneralization is applying particular language rules to the utterances where they cannot be applied (e.g. the usage of the ending –s for other persons in Present Simple Tense, not only for the third person singular: “*They sings"*).

The third source of errors is the context of learning. “Context” here means the teacher and the classroom and the materials used in school learning, or the social situation, when talking about untutored second language learning. According to Brown (1987), when in the class, the teacher or the textbooks can mislead the learner into using incorrect ideas about the language, which can be called ‘false concepts’ or ‘induced errors’. These errors occur due to misdirecting explanations of the teacher or erroneous presentations of structures in a textbook. The social context of language learning will result in other types of errors, mostly deriving from certain dialect acquisition (e.g. *“I gonna”, “I wanna”, “I ain’t”* etc.).

However, there are several shortcomings of *error analysis*. Most of the researchers relied too much on errors and they excluded other information about language learning. Brown (1987) lists Schachter (1974) and others who have pointed out that error analysis cannot show the real competence of learners if they avoid using particular structures, words or sounds. This avoidance might be the result of the learners’ difficulty with those particular items of language.

3. Language competences

3.1. Communicative competence

Users and learners draw upon a number of competences resulting from their previous experience in order to carry out the tasks and activities when dealing with the communicative situations in which they are involved. Therefore, all human competences are important for the learner's ability to communicate. These competences include general competences, such as declarative knowledge, sociocultural knowledge, intercultural awareness, different skills and know-how, existential competence, study skills etc. (CEFR, 2005: 101-107).

Dell Hymes coined the term *communicative competence* in 1962. Before that, the most widely accepted notion of competence was the one by Chomsky. He distinguished competence and performance in his famous book ”Aspects of the theory of Syntax“ and defined competence as the monolingual speaker-listener's knowledge of language. Hymes, on the other hand, distinguished between linguistic and communicative competence and showed “the difference between knowledge about language rules and forms and knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively” (Brown, 1987: 199).

In the 1980s there arose an increasing interest in the communicative language teaching. The scholars considered that the main aim of teaching second languages was communication with native speakers of the second language. Brown (1987) claims that this approach centers on speaking and listening skills, and writing for specific communicative purposes, and on ”authentic“ reading texts.

According to Brown (1987), who based his conclusions on the Canale and Swain model, there are four different components or subcategories of communicative competence. The first two of them deal with the use of linguistic system itself. Grammatical competence is “that aspect of communicative competence that encompasses knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology” (Brown, 1987: 199). Actually, it is the same one that Hymes referred to as ‘linguistic competence’. The second subcategory is discourse competence, which is the “ability we have to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form a

meaningful whole out of a series of utterances" (Brown, 1987: 199). The last two subcategories are sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence.

Another approach towards communicative competence appeared in 1990s and was devised by Bachman and Palmer. Their model differentiates language knowledge and strategic competence. "Language knowledge consists of two main components – organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge" (Bagarić, 2007: 98). Organisational knowledge is then divided into grammatical and textual knowledge. Grammatical knowledge includes knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology and graphology.

The most recent model that appeared is the one described in the Common European Framework - CEFR (2001). In the CEFR, the communicative competence includes three basic components: language competence, sociolingusitic competence and pragmatic competence. Language or linguistic competence refers to knowledge of and ability to use language resources to form well structured messages (Bagarić, 2007). Language competence consists of lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences.

Different terminology has been used to refer to the levels of language competence. Most of the terms result from different language organisations' test scores. Some of them are ALTE levels, Cambridge ESOL levels, IELTS levels and TOEFL levels. In the recent years Council of Europe has introduced Common European Framework (CEFR) to describe learners' competences in different language skills and this terminology is being used most frequently nowadays.

According to CEFR, there is an outline framework of six broad levels which gives an adequate coverage of the learning space relevant to European learners. They are the following: Breakthrough, Waystage, Threshold, Vantage, Effective Operational Proficiency, Mastery. These six levels are actually the interpretation of the classic division into basic, intermediate and advanced. Since some of the names given to Council of Europe specifications for levels are difficult to translate into other languages, a scheme which divides an initial division into three broad levels (A,B,C) was proposed (Figure 1).

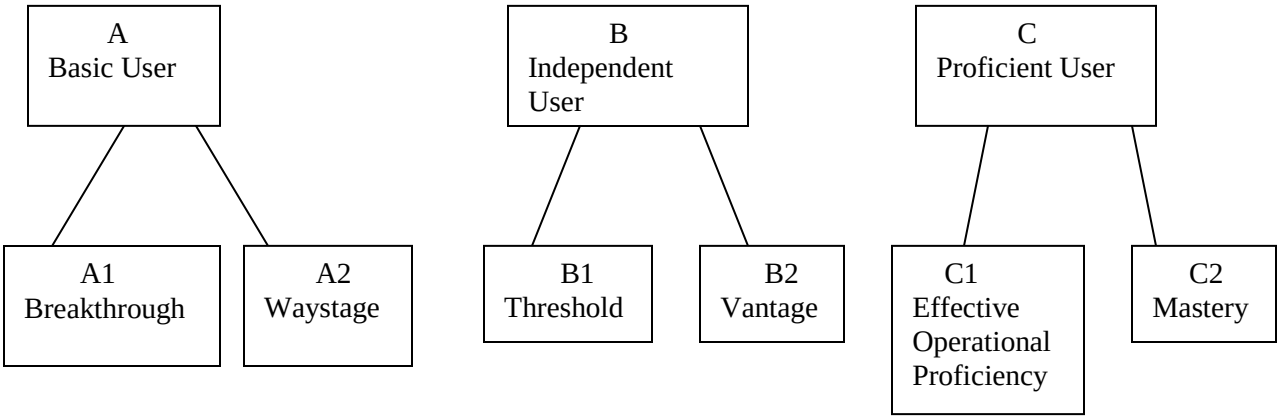

Figure 1: An outline framework of six broad levels

3.2. Grammatical competence

According to the CEFR, grammatical competence may be defined as "knowledge of, and ability to use, the grammatical resources of a language" (CEFR, 2004: 112) or as it is later explained: "Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognising well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with these principles (as opposed to memorising and reproducing them as fixed formulae)" (CEFR, 2004: 113).

When describing grammatical organization, CEFR (2004) specifies the following: elements (e.g.morphs, morphemes-roots and affixes, words; number, case, gender, concrete/abstract, countable/uncountable, (in)transitive, active/passive voice, past/present/future tense, progressive, (im)perfect aspect; conjugations, declensions, open word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, closed word classes (grammatical elements); compound and complex words, phrases: (noun phrase, verb phrase, etc.), clauses: (main, subordinate, co-ordinate), sentences: (simple, compound, complex); nominalisation, affixation, suppletion, gradation, transposition, transformation; government, concord, valency.

Since grammatical competence is usually not seen as a separate area or separate skill, the descriptors referring to the four basic skills can be applied to grammar as well, because the knowledge of grammar is imbued in all the skills.

Concerning grammatical competence, CEFR states that a learner at A2 level: "Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes-for example, tends to mix up tenses and forget to mark agreement; nevertheless, it is usually clear what he/she is trying to say" (CEFR, 2005: 114). British Council-EAQUALS Core Inventory for General English, which represents the core of English language taught at CEFR, lists the following items as relevant for A2 level competence:

> "Adjectives-comparative-use of than and definite article; Adjectives-superlative-use of definite article; Adverbial phrases of time, place and frequency-including word order; Articles-with countable and uncountable nouns; Countables and Uncountables: much/many; Gerunds; Imperatives; Modals (can/could/have to/should); Possessives- use of 's/s'; Prepositional phrase (time, place, movement); Prepositions of time: on/in/at; Verb +ing/infinitive: like/want-would like; Wh-questions in past; Zero and First Conditional; present simple tense; present continuous tense; future simple tense (will/going to); past simple tense; past continuous tense; present perfect tense" (British Council-EAQUALS Core Inventory for General English, 2010: 11).

4. Assessing and Evaluating Grammatical Competence

Before discussing the ways in which grammar can be evaluated in foreign language learning, the status of grammar should be defined. Some scholars consider that grammar can be evaluated separately from the other components of the language system (e.g. lexis, phonology). The others who find discourse as the unit of analysis think that grammar is a part of holistic system. However, it is generally considered that grammar has the central part in evaluation of language ability. The knowledge of grammar is important for all language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing.

When evaluating grammatical competence Purpura (2007) distinguishes between formative and summative evaluations. "Formative evaluation relating to grammar assessment supplies information during a course of instruction or learning on how test-takers might increase their knowledge of grammar, or how they might improve their ability to use grammar in communicative contexts" (Purpura, 2004: 147). On the other

hand, summative evaluation gives an overall assessment of learners' performance considering their grammatical ability. Usually it is done at the end of a programme or instruction.

Božinović (2012) agrees with Wayne Rimmer that, taking into consideration different aspects of evaluation of grammatical competence, two dimensions of grammar can be measured, and these are 'range' and 'accuracy'. 'Range' refers to the variety and complexity of grammar structures the test-takers use. 'Accuracy', on the other hand, refers to the control of the structures and the absence of errors. . Evaluating range is especially important with longer pieces of speaking and writing (extended-production tasks). The goal of every grammar test is "to obtain (and provide) information on how well a student knows or can use grammar to convey meaning in some situation where the target language is used" (Purpura, 2004: 147). Since it is not possible to observe a person's grammatical ability directly, one can only infer the underlying ability from responses to test items. These score-based inferences can have different usages; they provide feedback for learning and instruction, they are important in assigning grades and they can help in making decisions about programme placement.

Before administering a test, test usefulness should be considered. Bachman and Palmer (as cited in Purpura, 2004) have proposed a framework of test usefulness, which lists the following six complementary qualities: reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact and practicality. Tests also have to have a specific purpose in mind, they should be designed for a specific audience and have a reference to a specific target language use domain (Purpura, 2004: 148).

A test is reliable if it provides the same results every time it is administered regardless of the conditions; it should not differ drastically as a result of the time of the test administration and the form of the test used. It should also be consistent regarding the raters who might have scored the responses.

Bachman and Palmer (as cited in Purpura, 2004) defined construct validity as "the extent to which we can interpret a given test score as an indicator of the ability(ies), or construct(s), we want to measure. Construct validity also has to do with the domain of generalization to which our score interpretations generalize" (Purpura, 2004: 150). Thus, it tells us whether we are measuring what we have intended to measure.

The quality of authenticity refers to the degree of correspondence between the test-task characteristics and the target language use task characteristics. Authentic tests measure grammatical ability in a way learners can encounter as tasks in real life.

The fourth quality of test usefulness refers "to the degree to which the aspects of the test-taker's language ability we want to measure are engaged by the test-task characteristics (e.g. the input response, and relationship between the input and response) based on the test constructs" (Purpura, 2004: 153). In other words, the interactive quality of the test means that the task should have the characteristics that we want to measure given the test purpose, and nothing else.

The quality of impact refers to the degree to which testing and test score decisions influence all aspects of society and the individuals within it. Therefore, when making a useful test we must be aware of the possible consequences from what the results of the test might represent, and thus the test should promote positive experiences of testing leading to positive attitudes and actions. One type of test impact is called 'washback'. It is the degree to which testing has an influence on learning and instruction (Purpura, 2004).

The last of the qualities that a useful test should have is the quality of practicality. A test is practical if it is possible to balance the costs associated with designing, administering, and scoring a test and the quality of the test itself.

4.1. Grammar test tasks

There are many different ways to categorize the types of test tasks. One of the classifications is based on scoring procedure. There are 'objective test tasks' (e.g. true/false tasks, multiple-choice tasks), where no expert judgment is required when evaluating performance regarding the criteria for correctness. On the other hand, 'subjective test tasks' (e.g. essays) require expert judgment interpreting and evaluating performance.

According to the type of response, as shown in the Table 1, there is a list of tasks divided into three main groups: selected-response tasks, limited-production tasks and extended-production tasks.

Table 1: Examples of task types (source: Purpura, 2004: 127)

Selected-response tasks	Limited-production tasks	Extended-production tasks
- Multiple-choice activities - True/false activities - Matching activities - Discrimination activities - Lexical list activities - Grammaticality judgment activities	- Gap-filling activities - Cloze activities - Short-answer activities - Dictation activities - Information-transfer activities - Some information-gap activities	- Summaries, essays - Dialogues, interviews - Role-plays, simulations - Stories, reports - Some information-gap activities - Problem-solving activities - Decision-making activities

5. Exploring the eighth primary school graders' attainment in English as a foreign language

This chapter will present the aims, the procedure and the results of the research dealing with the attainment in English as a foreign language of the eighth primary school graders. Starting from the grammatical competence required for this level of learners' knowledge, the aim was to establish whether the eighth primary school graders have achieved it.

The pupils leaving primary school are expected to have reached A2 level of language competence (according to CEFR). The following table shows what is expected from the learners at this level. (Most of the descriptors in CEFR are given in the form of self-assessment statements).

Table 2: Descriptors for A2 level according to CEFR

	Reception		**Interaction**		**Production**	
	Listening	**Reading**	**Spoken Interaction**	**Written Interaction**	**Spoken Production**	**Written Production**
A2	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job	I can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like „and", „but“ and „because“.

As part of A2 level, Croatian National Educational Standard (“Hrvatski nacionalni obrazovni standard”) requires the following grammatical structures to be acquired at the end of the primary school. At the productive level the pupils are expected to operate with:

> “Present simple tense, present continuous tense, present perfect tense (form, meaning, usage); past simple tense, past continuous tense (form, meaning, usage); simple future tense, going to future tense, present simple tense and present continuous tense (to refer to the future action); modal verbs (can, could, be able to, may, might, must, have to, ought to, shall, should, will, would); can with the

verbs of perception; question tags (form and usage); passive voice of the main tenses (simple present tense, future tense, past tense) and their form, meaning and usage; regular and irregular plural of nouns, countable and uncountable nouns; cardinal and ordinal numbers (dates, years, sports results, addresses, telephone numbers etc.); pronouns (personal - subjective and objective case, relative - who, which, that, whose, whom, and reflexive and indefinite pronouns); possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns and the difference in their form and usage; comparison of adjectives and comparison of equality; adverbs of manner (form and usage); adverbs of place, time and frequency and their position in a sentence; relative pronoun "where"; distinguishing adverbs and adjectives in usage, form and place in a sentence; usage and omission of articles in front of abstract, mass nouns and geographical terms; quoted and reported speech, indirect questions in the present tenses; indirect requests and orders; word order (S – V – O)" (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta, 2006).

At the receptive level the pupils are expected to be familiar with "conditional clauses (1st and 2nd conditional); time clauses)" (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta, 2006: 100-101).

The present study focused on the acquisition of tenses but other grammatical structures were evaluated as well. Additionally, an error analysis was conducted in order to explore frequency of pupils' errors and to explore possible causes of errors.

5.1. Aims of the study

The general aim of the research was to compare pupils' grammatical competence with the one required by A2 level of CEFR. The research was focused on the acquisition of the tenses and other grammatical structures as covered in CEFR and HNOS[1] for that level.[2] The main research questions were: Which of the tenses cause difficulties to

[1] HNOS was used as a guideline, although it is not considered an official document any more.

[2] "The study of tense-aspect morphology has been the focus of many descriptive and pedagogical accounts of language. In fact, tense-aspect morphology occupies a central place in the curricula of many language programs. It is not uncommon for language teaching programs to include mastery of certain tense aspect

pupils? What other grammatical structures cause problems? Which grammar structures are acquired at productive and which at receptive level? Is there a relationship between pupils' grades and their grammar knowledge? Is there a relationship between pupils' self-evaluation of grammar knowledge and a) their grade in English and b) final grammar test score? Have the pupils acquired grammatical knowledge at A2 level?

5.2. Participants

In order to conduct the survey for the research two primary schools in Osijek ("OŠ.Mladost") and nearby village of Darda ("OŠ.Darda") were asked to participate. All pupils been learning English from the 1st grade. Two eight grade classes from each school were tested. In total, there were seventy-seven pupils of different abilities.

Their language learning success in general can be seen in Table 3 which shows the pupils' grades in English at the end of the previous school year. The students were asked to self-evaluate their grammar knowledge and their estimation can also be seen from table 3.

Table 3: Grades in English and the learners' self-evaluation of their knowledge of grammar

Grade	Frequency	Percent	Self-eval.grade (grammar)	Frequency	Percent
5	40	51.3%	5	19	24.7%
4	23	29.5%	4	33	42.9%
3	11	14.1%	3	14	18.2%
2	3	3.8%	2	11	14.3%

As can be seen from Table 3, only 3.8% of the learners had a sufficient mark (2) in English, 14.1% a good mark (3), 29.5% a very good mark (4), and 51.3% had an excellent mark (5) last year. This means that 82% of the learners have good grades in

forms in their criteria for advancement from one course to another, and tense and aspect clearly play an important role in grammatically focused pedagogical materials" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000:1).

English (4 and 5) and that they are generally very successful language learners. The average grade for the sample is 4.30.

The answers to the demographic questions have shown that although there were 51.3% of the learners who have excellent grade in English (5) when asked to evaluate their grammatical knowledge, only 24.7% of the learners thought their knowledge of grammar deserved the excellent mark (see Table 4). 14.3% of the learners thought that they deserved a sufficient grade (2), 18.2% evaluated their knowledge as good (3) and 42.9% of the learners evaluated their knowledge as very good (4).

5.3. Instruments

To test the pupils' receptive and productive knowledge of the tenses a test consisting of two parts was designed.

The first part of the test probing receptive knowledge was a twenty item multiple-choice cloze. In the receptive part of the test it was important to include all the tenses required for A2 level knowledge. There were examples of various forms, such as affirmative sentences, as well as of the interrogative and negative ones. In the productive part the pupils were also asked to translate all three types of sentences (positive, interrogative and negative). There were various examples of the form and usage of the tenses, other verb forms (gerund and infinitive) and modal verbs. The usage of articles, prepositions, pronouns (personal and possessive), nouns (countable, uncountable, possessive case, plural form), adjectives (comparison), adverbs (time and frequency) was also tested. The second part tested the productive knowledge of tenses. The pupils were asked to translate twenty sentences from Croatian into English (see Appendix 1).

In addition, two demographic questions were asked. The aim was to find out what pupils' grades in English were and how they self-evaluated their grammar knowledge (see Appendix 1).

In order to analyse learners' errors they were divided into certain categories covering all grammatical structures, and it was based on the requirements of HNOS for the eight grade of primary school. These categories will be listed later in the paper.

5.4. Procedure

The test was administered in four eighth grade classes in two primary schools. The tests were administered by the learners' English teachers during their regular classes of English. The testing lasted forty-five minutes. The pupils wrote down their answers on the tests.

The second stage of the study focused on the analysis of errors in tenses and other grammatical structures. For the statistical analysis of the collected data the IBM SPSS 20 was used. The following statistical methods were applied: frequencies and correlation. Frequencies were used to determine how many pupils had sufficient, good, very good and excellent mark in English in the seventh grade and to see which answer was most frequently given for each test question by the pupils. In addition, the learners' errors in the productive part were thoroughly analysed. After that, Pearson correlation was used to determine the relationship between pupils' grade in English and their test score, but also between the pupils' self-evaluation of grammar knowledge and the test score.

The research primarily dealt with the acquisition of tenses at A2 level. On the receptive part of the test, which consisted of 20 multiple choice items, pupils could score maximum 20 points. On the productive part of the test, which consisted of twenty sentences, pupils could score twenty-three points. The sentences included different aspects of grammar knowledge required at A2 level but only verb tenses and other verb forms scored the points. Some sentences, which covered more than one tense or verb form scored more points (see Apendix 1). The three criteria according to which uninterpretable structures were considered as errors were verb form, verb tense and aspect. The errors in other grammatical structures were included in the error analysis, but were not scored. Thus, the overall score of both parts of the test was 43 points.

5.5. Results

The results of the research are shown in two parts. The first part deals with the overall analysis of the learners' score in the receptive and the productive exam. The second part focuses on the error analysis.

The following table shows how learners acquired the tenses required at A2 level (Table 4).

Table 4: The percentage of correct answers for all tenses

	The percentage of correct answers		
Tense	Receptive knowledge	Productive knowledge	Receptive + productive knowledge
Present simple tense	60.7 %	69.09 %	64.89 %
Present continuous tense	84.63 %	78.3 %	81.46 %
Future simple	82.05 %	78.85 %	80.45 %
Past simple tense	73.91 %	51.27 %	62.59 %
Past continuous tense	84.2 %	51.3 %	67.75 %
Present perfect simple tense	69.26 %	13.45 %	41.35 %
Overall tense usage	80.9 %	60.36 %	69.91 %

The percentage of correct answers for the present simple tense at the receptive level was 60.7%, and at the productive level it was 69.09%. The average percentage of the correct answers for the present simple has shown that 64.89% of pupils did well on this part of the test. The learners showed better knowledge of the present continuous tense at the receptive level: the percentage of correct answers was 84.63%, and at the productive level it was 78.3%. The average percentage was 81.46%. The correct answers for the future tense at the receptive level were 82.05%, and for the productive level 78.85%. The average was 80.45%. Learners' score at the receptive level for the past simple tense was 73.91%, and at the productive level it was 51.27%. On average, their knowledge of the past simple has shown that 62.59% of the pupils have mastered this tense. The percentage of correct answers for the past continuous tense at the receptive level was 84.2%, and at the productive level it was 51.3%. The average of the correct answers for the past continuous was 67.75%. As expected, the learners were less successful in the present perfect tense and their score at the receptive level was 69.26%, and at the productive level 13.45%. The average score for the Present Perfect has shown

that only 41.35% of the pupils did well in this part of the test. Detailed results can be seen in Appendix 2 (see Appendix 2).

Finally, as can be seen from the chart of the final test results of the receptive knowledge of the tenses (Figure 2), there are more learners with better score (28 learners scored 18 points and more) than the learners with low score (9 learners scored 10 points and less). There are 6 pupils with the highest score (20points), 11 pupils scored 19 points, 11 pupils scored 18 points etc., while only five pupils had the score lower than ten points.

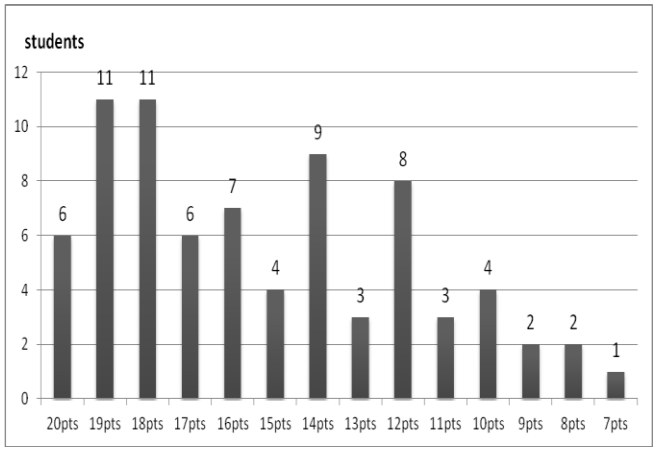

Figure 2: The distribution of test score (receptive knowledge)

The chart of the final test results on the productive knowledge (Figure 3) indicates that most of the pupils have shown slightly higher knowledge than average. Thirty-seven out of seventy-seven pupils are placed in the first third according to their score (no one has scored the maximum of 23 points), twenty-six pupils are in the group which belongs to the second third and there are fourteen pupils in the last third.

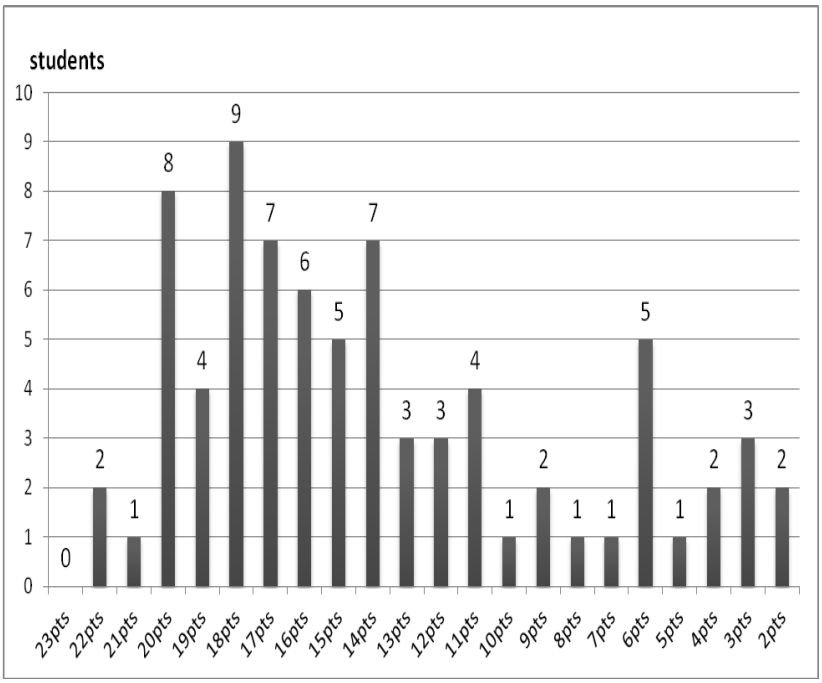

Figure 3: The distribution of test score (productive knowledge)

When it comes to the correct usage of tenses, the average score of the receptive part of the test was 80.9%, while the average score of the productive test was 60.36%. When the results of the receptive and productive knowledge were added, the average percentage of the correct answers was calculated and it was 69.91%. This can be seen in the following chart (Figure 4).

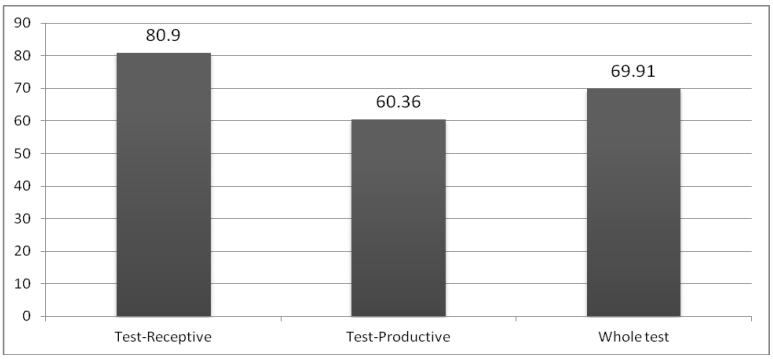

Figure 4: Average scores for the receptive and the productive part of the test, and average score for the whole test

Table 5 shows the correlation between pupils' grade in English and their test score. As can be seen from this table, there is a statistically significant correlation between pupils' grade in English and their test score. The table also shows even higher correlation between the pupils' self-evaluation of grammar knowledge and the test score, which means that the learners were rather objective when evaluating themselves.

Table 5: Correlation - test score and pupils grades/ test score and self-evalution

	Grade in English	**Self-evaluation of grammar knowledge**
Test score	,635**	,754**

6. Error analysis

The following part of the paper will focus on a more detailed analysis of the errors in the usage of tenses, but also on the errors in the formation and usage of other grammatical structures required for the A2 level. This part of the research was done in order to find out what the most frequent errors were and what might be the reasons for them.

After the data were collected, the errors were identified, classified and counted. The final step was to analyse the possible sources of errors.

The errors were divided into the following categories: errors with verbs - errors in tenses (usage and form), modal verb errors, gerund and infinitive; erroneous usage of questions; errors with nouns - plural, possessive case; errors with determiners - articles, quantifiers; errors with pronouns - usage and form; errors with prepositions - errors in usage; errors with adjectives - comparative and superlative form; errors with adverbs - errors in usage, spelling and position. Each of the categories was subdivided according to specific errors as can be seen in Table 6. Since the primary aim of the translation exercise was to establish the learners' knowledge of the tenses[2], a thorough analysis was done in this area. It was important to see whether the learners used the appropriate form of each tense and also whether they were able to use the particular tense correctly according to its time and aspect. With the other grammatical structures, the form and usage were also observed. (The detailed examples and the number of errors can be seen in Appendix 3)

There were many learners who did not translate whole sentences. It is impossible to explain whether they had problems with the particular structures required in those sentences or they were lacking the vocabulary needed, or there were other reasons for doing so. Thus, those omitted sentences were not included in the analysis since they could not be classified into appropriates categories, although they might also indicate learners' difficulties with certain grammatical structures.

Table 6: Types of errors

ERRORS WITH VERBS	ERRONEOUS USAGE OF TENSES	PRESENT SIMPLE	Present Continuous instead of Present Simple (aspect) Past Simple instead of Present Simple (time)
		PRESENT CONTINUOUS	Present Simple instead of Present Continuous (aspect)
		PAST SIMPLE	Present Simple instead of Past Simple (time) (Present Perfect instead of Past Simple (aspect) Past Continuous instead of Past Simple (aspect) Pres Continuous instead of Past Simple (time and aspect)
		PAST CONTINUOUS	Present Simple instead of Past Continuous (time and aspect)
		PRESENT PERFECT	Present Simple instead of Present Perfect Present Continuous instead of Present Perfect (aspect) Past Simple instead of Present Perfect (aspect) Past Continuous instead of Pres Perfect (time and aspect) Past Perfect instead of Present Perfect (time)
		FUTURE SIMPLE	Present Simple instead of Future Simple (time)
	ERRONEOUS TENSE FORMATION	PRESENT SIMPLE	Erroneous tense form
		PAST CONTINUOUS	Erroneous tense form
		PAST SIMPLE	Erroneous irregular verb form Erroneous negative past form of the verb "to be"
MODAL VERB ERRORS		MODAL VERB 'CAN'	Erroneous usage of the present form Erroneous usage of the past form Erroneous negative form

GERUND AND INFINITIVE ERRORS	USAGE	GERUND	Infinitive instead of gerund
	FORM	INFINITIVE	Infinitive errors (erroneous infinitive form)
ARTICLE ERRORS	USAGE	THE	Omission of the article "the" Omission of the article "the" in front of the superlative Omission of the article "the" Article "a" instead of "the"
		A	Article "the" instead of "a" Omission of the article "a"
			"A" where article should be omitted "The" where article should be omitted
PREPOSITION ERRORS			Preposition "off" Preposition "than" Preposition "at" Preposition "to" Preposition "in" Preposition "since"
ADVERB ERRORS	USAGE		Adverb "while" Adverb "yesterday" Adverb "often" Adverb "ago"
	POSITION		Erroneous position of an adverb of frequency
NOUN ERRORS	NUMBER	PLURAL	Singular instead of plural Wrong spelling of the plural form
	POSSESSIVE CASE	SINGULAR NOUN	Wrong possessive case
		PLURAL NOUN	Wrong possessive case Omission of the possessive case
ADJECTIVE ERRORS	FORM: COMPARISON	COMPARATIVE FORM	Erroneous comparative form
		SUPERLATIVE FORM	Erroneous superlative form

PRONOUN ERRORS	FORM	POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	Erroneous form of the possessive pronoun
	USAGE	POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	Erroneous usage of the possessive pronoun
	FORM	INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS	Erroneous form of the interrogative pronoun
	USAGE	INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS	Erroneous usage of the interrogative pronoun
QUANTIFIERS	USAGE	QUANTIFIER 'MUCH'	Erroneous usage of a quantifier Omission of a quantifier
ERRONEOUS USAGE OF QUESTIONS:	FORM	AUXILIARY VERB 'TO HAVE' AND 'TO DO'	Omission of inversion Omission of "do"
		MAIN VERB	Erroneous verb form after auxiliary:

In the first part of the error analysis the errors with verbs are discussed and in the second part the errors with other grammatical structures are interpreted. To begin with, learners' errors in the usage of tenses will be analysed. The tenses dealt with are present simple, past simple and present perfect, since in the other tenses the errors were not numerous.

6.1. Erroneous usage and formation of verb structures

Fifteen learners used present continuous instead of present simple. The learners' sentences were: "*I am not going to church every Sunday" and" Jack and Bill is/are playing football often"* where the expected sentences were: *"I don't go to church every Sunday"* and*"Jack and Bill often play football".* The reason for this type of error might be that very often present continuous is used in conversational English so extensively that it even substitutes present simple on some occasions. The learners who have encountered

these examples in various sources (movies, internet, songs) cannot be selective enough to distinguish the appropriate usage of present simple when it is actually needed.

Although there are not many learners who confused present simple and past simple, there are a few who make errors, especially in the interrogative form where they do not distinguish 'did' from 'does'. They might be aware that the auxiliary verb 'to do' is needed, but they do not know its forms. One of the examples to show it is: "*Whose dog does she find?"* where it was expected "*Whose dog did she find?".* Thus, this type of error could be the result of intralingual interference.

A number of learners (26) have problems distinguishing continuous aspect in the past tense. They used past continuous instead of past simple. The reason might be that they are not aware of the difference between the completed and uncompleted activity in the past. The expected sentence in the test was *"Where did you go last Saturday?"* where three learners wrote *"Where were you going…?"*

As expected, the learners have made most of the errors with the usage of present perfect tense because its equivalent does not exist in Croatian. When required to translate a sentence that is in the present tense in Croatian, the learners used present simple although present perfect simple was expected in English. This type of error is clearly the result of interlingual transfer. The Croatian sentence was: "On uči engleski od 2005 godine." 35 learners translated it with the following variations: "*He learns/studies/ learn/study…"* A number of learners used present continuous instead of present perfect. There were 30 of them who translated the same sentence as the following: "*He is learning/studying English…"*. In this case, in addition to using present tense, these learners stressed the duration of the action and therefore chose present continuous.

Another example of a possible interlingual transfer can be seen in the usage of past simple instead of present perfect. The Croatian sentence contained Croatian 'perfekt' which probably misled the learners into using English equivalent 'past simple'. The Croatian sentence was: "To je najbolji film koji je ona ikada vidjela." 38 learners wrote: "*… she ever saw/watched.*"

In the next part erroneous tense formation will be looked at. The errors occurred mostly in the formation of present simple tense and past simple tense. Also, the usage of modal verbs, and the usage and formation of gerund and infinitive will be discussed.

Although most learners recognize the form and usage of the present simple, there is still quite a large group of them who make errors confusing the third person singular form with the form of other persons. They use '-s' or '-es' where it is not required, and omit it where it is required (e.g. *Jack and Bill plays football. Ben like playing computer games.)*. The cause of this error might be intralingual transfer. Specifically, some learners are aware that present simple requires an inflection but are not sure when.

Another example of intralingual interference can be seen in the formation of past simple. Most learners know when to use past simple and they also know that it is formed by either adding the ending '–d' or '-ed' or by using special form with irregular verbs. However, there is a number of students who misspell the irregular past simple form or confuse it with the regular form. There are five main types of errors the learners made: wrong spelling of the irregular form (e.g. *fellt, feld, brake, bruke*), using past participle instead of simple past (e.g. *broken*), using past simple form of another irregular verb (e.g. *felt* where *fell* was expected), using regular form instead of irregular form (e.g. *taked*) and adding the ending '–d' or '-ed' to the irregular past form (e.g. *broked, tooked*).

Intralingual interference can be very clearly seen with the formation of the negative of the past simple of the verb 'to be'. Some learners who are aware that in English the negative of the simple past is formed using the simple past of the auxiliary 'to do' + 'not', applied the same rule to form the negative of 'to be', which is the only exception to the rule. Some of the examples of the students' errors are: '*didn't be',' didn't was'*.

While it is true that most learners have no serious problems with the structure and usage of modal verbs, there are some who do not know how to express modality in the past. In the translation exercise, where the learners were expected to use 'couldn't read', there were examples such as 'didn't can read' and 'can't read'. This confusion might be the result of intralingual interference. The learners might have learnt that some modal verbs do not exist in the past, so they applied the same rule to all modals.

Surprisingly, the structure where most learners made the same error was the usage of infinitive where gerund was expected. The learners were asked to translate the following sentence from Croatian into English: *"Ben voli igrati kompjuterske igrice"*. Almost all the learners translated the sentence as *"Ben likes to play computer games"*.

There were only eleven learners who translated the sentence in the appropriate way: *"Ben likes playing…".* Although both structures are grammatically correct, in this particular case, gerund was expected because the sentence describes general situation and not the specific one, where infinitive is usually used. This is clearly intralingual transfer since the learners recognized the existing structure, which is also used with the similar purpose but it seems that they are not able to distinguish the subtle differences in meaning at their stage of learning.

In addition, the learners made another type of error related to infinitive. Not only did they not use it appropriately, but a group of learners (20 of them) used the wrong form. Some of them used bare infinitive instead of 'to infinitive' (*Ben likes play*…), and several learners added the ending –s to the infinitive (*Ben likes to plays*…). The first type of error might be influenced by Croatian, because in Croatian the infinitive consists of only one word and the learners literally copied the form of the structure. The second erroneous usage might have resulted from the influence of the English rule for the formation of the third person singular of the present simple. The learners misunderstood the concept and applied the same rule to the infinitive because the subject in the sentence was in the third person singular.

Another area connected to verbs where the learners made numerous errors was the interrogative form.

The formation of questions was mostly caused by intralingual interference. The most frequent error is the omission of the auxiliary verb 'to do' for example in the sentences with the verb 'to have'. The learners could have translated the Croatian sentence "Koliko tvornica on ima?" either as "How many factories does he have?" or "How many factories has he got?" Since in the latter sentence inversion is used, a large number of students applied inversion to the cases where 'got' did not exist. That might be the reason why they did not use the auxiliary 'to do'. The following are the sentences they produced: *'... has he?', '...have he?', '...he have?', '...he has?'* The students omitted the auxiliary with some other verbs as well (e.g. '*(Whose) dog she found yesterday?*', 'Where you went…?') but they did not invert the subject and the verb.

The other type of error, which is the most frequent in formation of interrogative, is the erroneous verb form after the auxiliary 'to do'. Many learners did not use bare

infinitive but either present or past form of the main verb (e.g. *'does John earns', 'does he has', 'did she found', 'did you went'*). Therefore, they recognize the tense but do not apply the specific rules for the formation of the interrogative.

6.2. Erroneous usage and formation of other grammatical structures

The following part of the paper deals with errors in various grammatical structures, namely, articles, prepositions, adverbs and adverbial phrases, nouns, adjectives, pronouns and quantifiers.

Since in Croatian language there are no articles, it is not surprising that learners made a large number of errors in these grammatical items. Although the learners at this level are expected to be familiar with the usage and omission of articles (as required by Croatian National Educational Standard the teachers in primary school probably do not put much emphasis on explaining specific details of the usage of articles. They are aware that this part of speech is difficult to teach and to learn, and at the same time something that is not acquired easily on one's own. Even the learners at higher levels of learning show insecurity in the usage of articles.

In the appendix (Appendix 3) it can be seen that there was a large number of different kinds of errors related to articles (definite article omitted, indefinite article omitted, definite article used instead of indefinite and vice versa). There was a group of learners (24 of them) who used the article where it should not have been used (e.g. *I don't go to the church…*). In this case this might be the consequence of intralingual interference since the learners are familiar with structures like: 'to the cinema', 'to the theatre' etc.

Since prepositions might be understood more as lexical than grammatical items, it is not surprising that most of the errors occurred due to the literal translation of the Croatian equivalents. Therefore, many learners made errors with the following prepositional phrases: 'fall off', 'better than', 'at home', 'to church', 'in English'. Several variants appeared in each of these phrases: *'fell from'/'fell out a chair', 'better from/of/off her', 'Jenny wasn't home', 'don't go in/ at the church', 'books on/at English'.* A number of learners also confused the preposition 'than' with the adverb 'then'. Instead of using

the preposition, they used the adverb. Many learners also chose the inappropriate English preposition ‘from’ instead of the preposition ‘since’, translating it literally from Croatian.

Although most errors related to prepositional phrases resulted from interlingual interference, in one occasion the intralingual transfer was also present in the example of the preposition ‘off’. Twenty-two learners used the preposition ‘of’ (which is more frequent in English) instead.

It seems that the learners are able to use the required adverbs and adverbial phrases without much difficulty. Still, there were some insecurities in the usage and in the positioning adverbs in the appropriate place in the sentence. Erroneous usage might be caused by interlingual interference, namely with the adverb ‘ago’. The learners used the adverb ‘before’ instead. The expected sentence was: *“Tom's brother took the pupils' bags two hours ago.”* Eighteen learners wrote: *“... took the pupils' bags before two hours.”*

The inappropriate position of an adverb of frequency could be seen in a few sentences. Several learners placed the adverb ‘often’ in the end position (e.g. *Jack and Bill play football often.)* They might have understood that adverbs of frequency could be used in the end of the sentence similarly to adverbs and adverbials of time.

The learners showed quite satisfactory knowledge of grammatical rules related to nouns in general and especially the formation of plural. The only errors with the plural occurred when the learners misspelled some nouns in plural (e.g. *‘factorys’* instead of ‘factories’). Erroneous formation of possessive case was another grammatical item that appeared. As expected, fewer learners made errors with the possessive form of the nouns in singular than with the ones in plural. Some learners were aware that the apostrophe was required, but they placed it incorrectly before the plural ending –s (e.g. *‘pupil’s bags’* instead of *‘pupils’ bags’*), several of them just kept the plural without the apostrophe (e.g. *‘pupils bags’*) and some might have thought that they were expected to form an adjective instead of the possessive case. They wrote *‘pupil bags’*.

The pupils used the required adjectives correctly and the only insecurity some of them showed was with the comparison of adjectives. Quite a few of them confused the formation of the comparative and the superlative form of short and long adjectives (e.g. *‘the most pretty girl’* instead of *‘the prettiest girl’*). Some learners confused the

comparative with the superlative (e.g. '*Jenny is best pupil than… '* instead of *'Jenny is a better pupil than…'*)

Personal pronouns did not pose problems to most students. They did not have many difficulties with the possessive pronouns either. The most serious error that occurred was with the interrogative pronoun 'whose'. Almost half of learners were not aware that the possessive pronoun was required but used the interrogative pronoun 'who' + the auxiliary verb 'to be' (i.e. 's') instead. The expected sentence was: *"Whose dog did she find yesterday?"* The learners wrote: *"Who's dog…?"* The explanation of this error might be that the learners were not aware of how to write down the expression that they can hear very often. They are not knowledgeable enough to recognize the need for possessive pronoun but write it down the way they are familiar with, which is interrogative pronoun + present simple of the verb 'to be'. There were also a few students who used the interrogative pronoun 'which' instead of 'whose' in the former sentence.

About a third of the learners used quantifiers incorrectly. The errors might have resulted from the misunderstanding of the countable and uncountable nouns and using inappropriate quantifiers with them (e.g. *'how many money'* instead of *'how much money'*, *'how much factories'* instead of *'how many factories'*).

7. Discussion

As the results of the study show, the receptive knowledge for most of the tenses was higher than the productive knowledge. The only exception was the usage of the present simple tense (the learners erred more in the receptive part of the test than in the productive one). This might be explained by the way pupils learn particular grammar structures. Some structures are remembered as chunks, e.g. *"I don't go to church every Sunday"*, where the pupils might not be aware of the usage of the Present Simple tense for habitual actions, but just reproduce the sentence they have heard quite often. The other reason might be that in the translation the pupils were asked to translate the sentences with the present simple of the verb 'to be', the verb that is used the most frequently and thus is not difficult for the pupils.

The pupils have not shown high acquisition of the Present Perfect tense at the productive level, which was expected, since there is no equivalent tense in Croatian. However, many pupils scored well in some sentences from the receptive part, which are also something like the previously mentioned chunks, e.g. "I have known her for a long time."; "How long have you known Ms Jones?"

The error analysis showed that except for the usage of present perfect tense the learners had more difficulties with the formation of tenses, where they could not recognize either time or aspect. With the other tenses, the time was generally appropriate and a few learners made errors related to aspect (e.g. present simple and present continuous tense). With reference to form the pupils had problems especially with the irregular verbs in the simple past tense and the form of the present simple (third person singular and plural). Quite a large number of errors occurred in the formation of interrogative and negative of present simple and simple past tense. Regarding other grammatical structures, the usage of articles and the form of the possessive case of nouns caused most difficulties (especially the possessive case of a plural noun).

Since the learners were asked to translate sentences to show their productive knowledge, it was expected that the source of most errors would be interlingual transfer. This occurred with present perfect tense and misusage of articles. However, there were many errors caused by intralingual interference in the case of grammatical structures where the learners recognized the general rules but confused the specific usage (e.g. the ending -s for the third person singular of present simple tense used for other persons).

It is also very interesting to see that most pupils are aware of their knowledge of grammar. It can be seen from the correlation between their test results and the way they evaluated themselves. They are also aware that their mark in English does not show their knowledge of grammar. It was surprising to see how strict the pupils were when it comes to self-evaluation of grammar compared to their actual grade in English.

8. Conclusion

This research was conducted in order to compare the pupils' grammatical competence with the one required by A2 level of CEFR. The study also presents how

well the pupils are able to apply their knowledge at the receptive and at the productive level of particular English tenses and other grammatical structures.

Pupils have done better at the receptive than at the productive level, as was expected. According to the expectations, the pupils had difficulties with some particular tenses, namely the present perfect tense. The erroneous usage of other grammatical structures was most frequently observed in the usage of articles, gerund and the possessive interrogative pronoun. Yet, a number of students avoided using particular grammatical structures so the real competence of the learners could not be entirely determined.

The correlation between the learners' test results and how they evaluated their grammatical knowledge shows that their mark in English does not always correspond to the success achieved at the test. However, the learners were objective when evaluating their grammatical knowledge themselves and estimated it as even lower than the test results have shown.

The research shows that most of the pupils in the eighth grade of primary school have reached A2 level of CEFR concerning the correct usage of the tenses and other grammatical structures required at that level.

However, the conclusions drawn upon the research may not be reliable enough since the group of pupils tested was quite small and they were examined only in written form with two short tests. The testing was conducted in this way because of the limitations imposed by the primary school teachers, who did not actually participate in the research itself but were only the supervisors. Therefore, they could not take a large amount of time out of their regular lessons to provide the research that is more thorough.

The results may be used as guidelines both by teachers and learners as to which steps to take to improve the areas of grammar that cause most difficulties to the learners.

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10. Appendix 1- Test

IME I PREZIME:

OCJENA IZ ENG.NA KRAJU 7.RAZREDA:

KAKO BI SAM/-A PROCJENIO/-ILA SVOJE ZNANJE IZ GRAMATIKE (1-5):

Circle the correct answer. (Zaokruži točan odgovor.)

1. Ann and John _____ to the theatre nowadays.

   A) don't go B) didn't go C) doesn't go

2. Why are you under the table? What _____?

   A) do you do B) are you doing B) you are doing

3. What kind of car _____?

   A) does she have B) she has C) does she has

4. I usually get up early but this morning I _____ at 9.30.

   A) getted up B) get up C) got up

5. We went to the cinema but we _____ the film.

   A) didn't enjoy B) don't enjoy C) haven't enjoyed

6. My mother _____ by air.

   A) has never travel B) is never travelled C) has never travelled

7. "Do you know Sarah?" "Yes, _____ a long time.

   A) I am knowing her for B) I have known her since C) I have known her for

8. I _____ at home this evening.

   A) stayed B)stay C)am staying

9. What _____ at the weekend?

   A) did you do B) you did do C)did you

10. "My bag is very heavy." "I _____ it for you."

    A) am carrying B) will carry C) I carry

11. Bill _____ on the project when his computer broke down.

    A) is working B) were working C) was working

12. How long _____ Ms Jones?

    A) did you know B) have you known C) you have known

13. "I _____ this work today."

    A) will not finish B) don't finish C) am not finishing

14. Look-_____ again.

    A) it is raining B) it rains C) it rain

15. Rose _____ her car to the mechanic last week.

    A) didn't take B) didn't took C) didn't taked

16. She _____ books in English.

    A) doesn't reads B) doesn't read C) don't read

17. What _____ when the phone rang?

    A) Angela was doing B) is Angela doing C) was Angela doing

18. Mr Pitt _____ his briefcase and left.

    A) taked B) took C) tooked

19. Yesterday at 10 o'clock _____ a newspaper.

    A) I read B) I was reading C) I am reading

20. John _____ football three years ago.

    A) plays B) play C) played

TRANSLATE THESE SENTENCES.

1. Dok je Carol prala prozore, pala je sa stolice. Slomila je ruku. (3 points)

_____

2. Maria je najljepša djevojčica u razredu, ali Jenny je bolja učenica od nje.

_____

3. Koliko novca John zarađuje? (1 point)

_____

4. Čijeg je psa ona jučer pronašla? (1 point)

_____

5. Jenny jučer nije bila kod kuće. (1 point)

_____

6. Ja ne idem u crkvu svake nedjelje. (1 point)

_____

7. Jučer je gledala dobar film. To je najbolji film koji je ikada gledala. (3 points)

_____

8. On uči engleski od 2005. (1 point)

_____

9. Gladna sam. Pojest ću sendvič. (2 points)

_____

10. Jack i Bill često igraju nogomet. (1 point)

_____

11. Pada snijeg, zar ne vidiš? (2 points)

_____

12. Josh je jako bogat. Koliko tvornica ima? (2 points)

_____

13. Gdje si išla prošle subote? (1 point)

_____

14. Nemoj dirati psa!

_____

15. Prošlo ljeto Tom nije mogao čitati knjige na engleskom. Sada ih može čitati.

_____

16. Tomov brat je uzeo učeničke torbe prije 2 sata. (1 point)

_____

17. Helen ne smije ići van. Mora pomoći svojoj mami.

_____

18. Ben voli igrati kompjutorske igrice. (1 point)

_____

19. Trebaš posjetiti doktora.

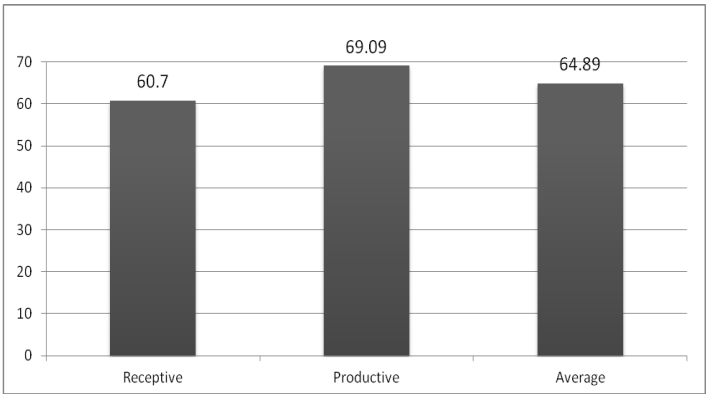
_____

20. Ako sretnem Rosie, nasmiješit ću se. (2 points)

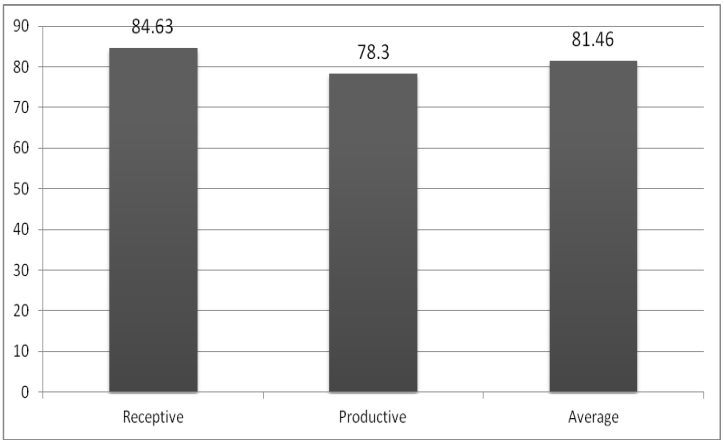
_____

11. Appendix 2: Test results for particular tenses

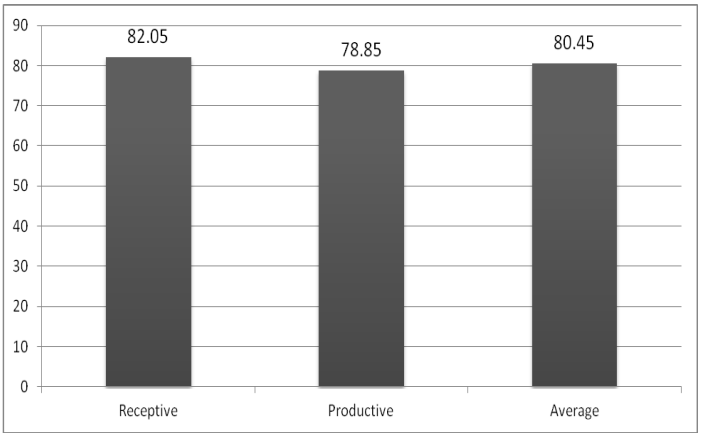
Present simple



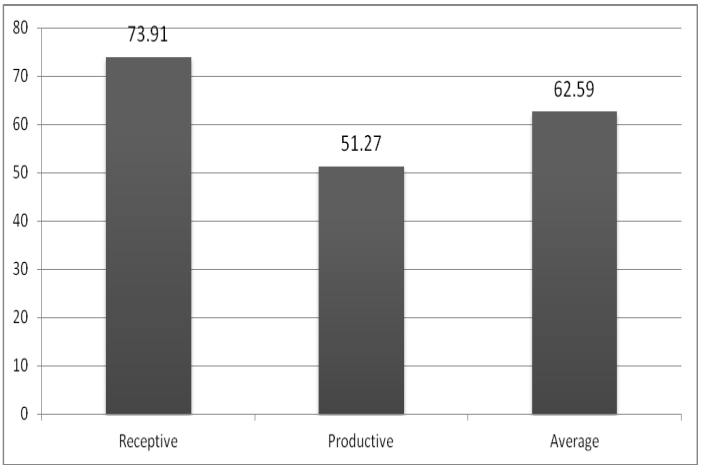
Present Continuous



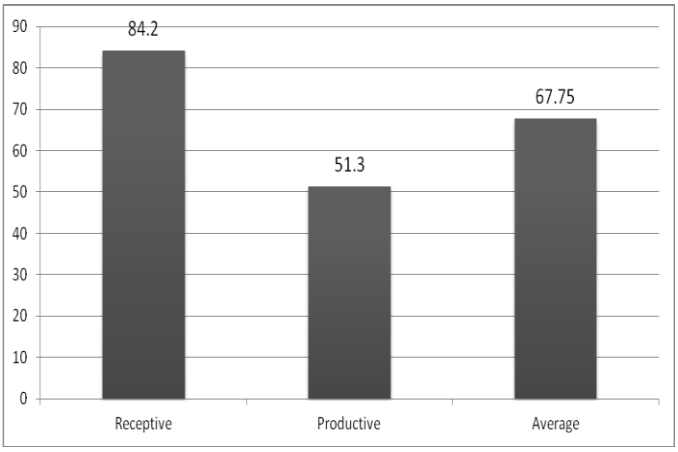
Future tenses



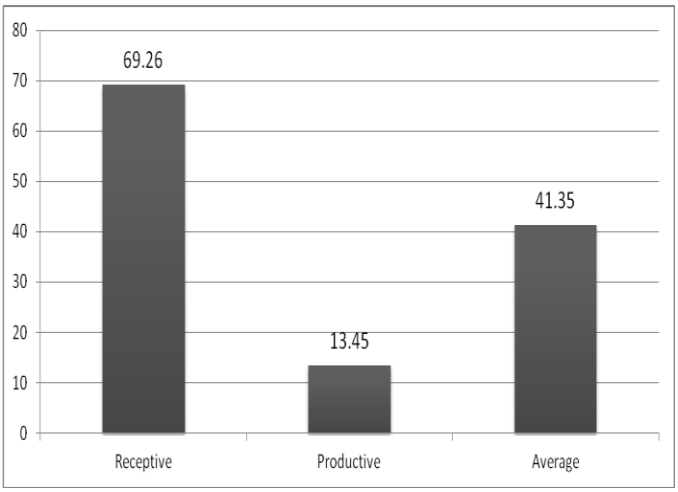
Past simple



Past continuous



Present perfect



12. Appendix 3:

I ERRORS WITH VERBS

ERRONEOUS USAGE OF TENSES

PRESENT SIMPLE

1 Present Continuous instead of Present Simple (wrong aspect: 15 errors all together)

The sentence should have been translated as:
Jack and Bill often play football.
The students who made mistakes wrote:
Jack and Bill is playing football often. (1 student)
Jack and Bill are playing football often. (1 student)

The expected sentence:
I don't go to church every Sunday.
The students' sentences:
I am not going… (13 students)

2 Past Simple instead of Present Simple (wrong time: 27 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
How much money does John earn?
The students' sentences:
… did John earn? (2 students)

The expected sentence:
It is the best movie she has ever seen/watched.
The students' sentences:
It was…. (20 students)

The expected sentence:
I don't go to church every Sunday.
The students' sentences:
I didn't go… (5 students)

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

1 Present Simple instead of Present Continuous (wrong aspect: 4 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
It is snowing/Snow is falling, can't you see?
The students' sentence:
It snows… (1 student)

Snow falls... (3 students)

PAST SIMPLE

1 Present Simple instead of Past Simple (wrong time: 17 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
Where did you go last Saturday?
The students' sentences:
Where you go… ? (6 students)
Where are you go… ? (3 students)

The expected sentence:
She saw/watched a good movie yesterday.
The students' sentences:
She watch… (5 students)

The expected sentence:
Whose dog did she find?
The students' sentences:
Whose dog does she find? (3 students)

2 Present Perfect instead of Past Simple (wrong aspect: 8 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Tom's brother took pupils' bags 2 hours ago.
The students' sentences:
Tom's brother has took… (3 students)
Tom's brother has taken… (5 students)

3 Past Continuous instead of Past Simple (wrong aspect: 26 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
Where did you go last Saturday?
The students' sentences:
Where were you going…? (3 students)

The expected sentence:
She saw/watched a good movie yesterday.
The students' sentences:
She was watching a good movie... (23 students)

4 Present Continuous instead of Past Simple (wrong time and aspect: 3 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
Where did you go last Saturday?

The students' sentences:
Where are you going…? (3 students)

PAST CONTINUOUS

1 Present Simple instead of Past Continuous (wrong time and aspect: 5 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
While Carol was washing the windows, she fell off the chair.
The students' sentences:
While Carol wash… (5 students)

PRESENT PERFECT
1 Present Simple instead of Present Perfect (wrong time and aspect: 39 errors all together)

The expected sentence (aspect)
He has studied/learnt English since 2005.
The students' sentences:
a) He learns/studies… (15 students)
b) He learn/study… (20 students)

The expected sentence (time and aspect)
It is the best movie she has ever seen/watched.
The students' sentences:
…she ever watch. (4 students)

2 Present Continuous instead of Present Perfect (wrong aspect: 30 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
He has studied/learnt English since 2005.
The students' sentences:
He is learning/studying… (30 students)

3 Past Simple instead of Present Perfect (wrong aspect: 43 errors all together)

3.1. The expected sentence:
It is the best movie she has ever seen/watched.
The students' sentences:
… she ever saw/watched. (38 students)

3.2. The expected sentence:
He has studied/learnt English since 2005.
The students' sentences:
He learned/studied … (5 students)

4 Past Continuous instead of Present Perfect (wrong time and aspect: 1 error)

The expected sentence:
He has studied/learnt English since 2005.
The students' sentences:
He was learning… (1 student)

5 Past Perfect instead of Present Perfect (wrong time: 2 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
It is the best movie she has ever seen/watched.
The students' sentence:
…she had ever watched/seen. (1 student)

The expected sentence:
He has studied/learnt English since 2005.
The students' sentence:
He had studied… (1 student)

FUTURE SIMPLE

1 Present Simple instead of Future Simple (wrong time: 3 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
I am hungry. I will eat a sandwich.
The students' sentences:
I am hungry. I eat a sandwich. (3 students)

ERRONEOUS TENSE FORMATION

PRESENT SIMPLE

1 Erroneous tense form (34 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
Jack and Bill often play football.
The students' sentences:
…plays football. (12 students)

The expected sentence:
Ben likes playing/to play computer games.
The students' sentences:
Ben like… (18 students)

The expected sentence:
She must/has to help her mom.

The students' sentences:
She have to… (4 students)

PAST CONTINUOUS

1 Erroneous tense form (9 errors all together)

The expected clause:
While Carol was washing the windows…
The students' clauses:
a) While Carol was wash the windows… (4 students)
b) While Carol were washing… (2 students)
c) While Carol washing…(1 student)
d) While Carol was washed… (2 students)

PAST SIMPLE

1 Erroneous irregular verb form (37 errors all together)

The expected clause:
…she fell off the chair.
The students' clauses:
a) …she felt… (9 students)
b) …she fellt… (2 students)
c) …she fall… (11 students)
d) …she feld… (1 student)
e) …she feel… (1 student)

The expected sentence:
She broke her arm.
The students' sentences:
a) *She broked…* (6 students)
b) *She broken…* (2 students)
c) *She break…* (1 student)
d) *She brake…* (1 student)
e) *She brooke…* (1 student)

The expected sentence:
Tom's brother took the pupils' bags two hours ago.
The students' sentences:
a) Tom's brother tooked… (2 students)

2 Erroneous negative past form of the verb "to be" (8 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
Jenny wasn't at home yesterday.

The students' sentences:

a) *Jenny didn't be…* (3 students)
b) *Jenny didn't was…* (3 students)
c) *Jenny not be…* (1 student)
d) *Jenny wasn't be…* (1 student)

II MODAL VERB ERRORS

MODAL VERB "CAN"

1 Erroneous usage

1.1. Erroneous usage of the present form (2 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Now he can read them.
The students' sentences:
a) *…he could read…* (1 student)
b) *…he can reads…* (1 student)

1.2. Erroneous usage of the past form **(**8 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Last summer Tom couldn't read books in English.
The students' sentences:
a) *…didn't can read…* (2 students)
b) *…can't read…* (6 students)

2 Erroneous form

2.1. Erroneous negative form (5 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
Helen can't go out.
The students' sentences:
a) *Helen don't go out.* (2 students)
b) *Helen doesn't go out.* (3 students)

III GERUND AND INFINITIVE MISTAKES

GERUND ERRORS

1 Erroneous usage
1.1. Infinitive instead of gerund (30 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Ben likes playing computer games.
The students' sentences:
Ben likes to play… (30 students)

INFINITIVE ERRORS

1 Erroneous form
1.1. Erroneous infinitive form (20 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Ben likes playing/to play computer games.

a) *Ben likes play…* (17 students)
b) *Ben likes to plays…* (3 students)

IV ARTICLE MISTAKES

ARTICLE "THE"

1 Article "a" instead of "the" (4 errors all together)
The expected clause:
Maria is the most beautiful girl in the class…
The students' clauses:
Maria is the most beautiful girl in a class…(4 students)

2 Omission of the article "the" (40 errors all together)

2.1. The expected clause:
While Carol was washing the windows…
The students' clauses:
…washing Ø windows… (40 students)

3 Omission of the article "the" in front of the superlative (11 errors all together)

3.1. The expected clause:
Maria is the most beautiful girl in class…
The students' clauses:
Maria is Ø most beautiful girl… (8 students)

3.2. The expected sentence:
It is the best film she has ever seen.
The students' sentences:
It is best film… (3 students)

4 Omission of the article "the" (29 errors all together)

4.1. The expected clause:
Maria is the most beautiful girl in the class…
- The students' clauses:
Maria is the most beautiful girl in Ø class… (29 students)

4.2. The expected sentence:
Don't touch the dog!
- The students' sentences:
Don't touch Ø dog! (7 students)

4.3. The expected sentences:
Tom's brother took the pupils' bags 2 hours ago.
- The students' sentences:
Tom's brother took Ø pupils' bags… (36 students)

ARTICLE "A"

1 Article "the" instead of "a" (13 errors all together)

The expected sentence:
Don't touch the dog!
- The students' sentences:
Don't touch a dog! (8 students)

1.2. The expected clause:
Maria is the most beautiful girl in the class…
- The students' clauses:
Maria is a most beautiful girl in class… (5 students)

2 Omission of the article "a" (107 errors all together)

2.1. The expected sentence:
While Carol was washing the windows, she fell off a chair.
- The students' sentences:
…, she fell off Ø chair. (6 students)

2.2. The expected clause:
…, but Jenny is a better pupil than her.
- The students' clauses:
…, but Jenny is Ø better pupil than her. (45 students)

2.3. The expected sentence:
She saw a good film yesterday.
- The students' sentences:
She saw good film yesterday. (15 students)

2.4. The expected sentence:
I will eat a sandwich.
- The students' sentences:
I will eat Ø sandwich. (26 students)

2.5. The expected sentence:
You should visit a doctor.
The students' sentences:
You should visit Ø doctor. (15 students)

ARTICLE WHERE IT SHOULD BE OMITTED

1 Article "a" where it should be omitted (3 errors all together)
1.1. The expected sentence:
Last summer Tom couldn't read books in English.
The students' sentences:
... read a books in English. (3 students)

2 Article "the" where it should be omitted (24 errors all together)
2.1. The expected sentence:
I don't go to Ø church every Saturday.
The students' sentences:
I don't go to the church… (24 students)

V ERRONEOUS USAGE OF PREPOSITIONS

PREPOSITION "OFF"

1 Wrong preposition (45 errors all together)
1.1. The expected clause:
..., she fell off a chair.
The students' clauses:
..., she fell of a chair. (22 students)
..., she fell at a chair. (1 student)
..., she fell out a chair. (1 student)
..., she fell out of a chair. (1 student)
..., she fell from a chair. (19 students)
..., she fell over a chair. (1 student)
2 Omission of the preposition (11 errors all together)
2.1. The expected clause:
..., she fell off a chair.
The students' clauses:
...she fell. (11 students)

PREPOSITION "THAN"

1 Preposition "from" instead of preposition "than" (6 errors all together)
The expected clause:
..., but Jenny is a better pupil than her.
- The students' clauses:
..., but Jenny is a better pupil from her. (3 students)

..., but Jenny is a better pupil of her. (2 students)
..., but Jenny is a better pupil off her. (1 student)

2 Adverb "then" instead of preposition "than" (14 errors all together)
The expected clause:
..., but Jenny is a better pupil than her.
The students' clauses:
..., but Jenny is a better pupil then her. (14 students)

PREPOSITION "AT"

1 Omission of the preposition "at" (8 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Jenny wasn't at home yesterday.
- The students' sentences:
Jenny wasn't home… (8 students)

PREPOSITION "TO"
1 Wrong preposition (19 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
I don't go to church every Saturday.
The students' sentences:
a) I don't go in the church… (12 students)
b) I don't go at the church… (7 students)

PREPOSITION "IN"
1 Wrong preposition (42 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Last summer Tom couldn't read books in English.
The students' sentences:
a) ... read books on English. (39 students)
b) ... read books at English. (3 students)

PREPOSITION "SINCE"
1 Adverb "from" instead of preposition "since" (2 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
He has studied English since 2005.
The students' sentences:
He has studied English from 2005. (2 students)

VI ERRONEOUS USAGE OF ADVERBS

USAGE

ADVERB "WHILE"

1 Adverb "when" instead of "while" (4 errors all together)
The expected clause:
While Carol was washing the windows,…
The students' clauses:
When Carol…, (4 students)

ADVERB "YESTERDAY"

1 Omission of the adverb "yesterday" (3 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Whose dog did she find yesterday?
The students' sentences:
Whose dog did she find? (3 students)

ADVERB "OFTEN"

1 Adverb “usually” instead of “often” (5 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Jack and Bill often play football.
The students' sentences:
…usually play football. (5 students)

ADVERB "AGO"

1 Adverb “before” instead of “ago” (18 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Tom's brother took the pupils' bags two hours ago.
The students' sentences:
… took the pupils' bags before two hours. (18 students)

POSITION

1 Erroneous position of an adverb of frequency (5 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Jack and Bill often play football.
The students' sentences:
…play football often. (5 students)

VII ERRONEOUS USAGE OF NOUNS

ERRONEOUS NUMBER

1 Singular instead of plural (6 errors all together)
The expected sentence:

While Carol was washing the windows,…
The students' sentences:
While Carol was washing the window,… (6 students)

ERRONEOUS POSSESSIVE CASE

1 Erroneous possessive case of a singular noun(1 error all together)
The expected sentence:
Tom's brother took the pupils' bags two hours ago.
The student's sentence:
Toms brother... (1 student)

2 Erroneous possessive case of a plural noun (34 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Tom's brother took the pupils' bags two hours ago.
The students' sentences:
a) … the pupils bags …(13 students)
b) … took the pupil's bags … (11 students)
c) … took the pupil bags. (10 students)

3 Omission of the possessive case (22 errors all together)
3.1. The expected sentence:
Tom's brother took the pupils' bags two hours ago.
The students' sentences:
… took the bags… (22 students)

VIII ERRONEOUS USAGE OF ADJECTIVES

ERRONEOUS COMPARISON

1 Erroneous comparative form (4 errors all together)
1.1. The expected clause:
…, but Jenny is a better pupil than her.
The students' clauses:
…, but Jenny is best pupil… (2 students)
…, but Jenny is clever pupil… (1 student)
…, but Jenny is great pupil… (1 student)

2 Erroneous superlative form (10 errors all together)
The expected clause:
Maria is the most beautiful girl in the class,…
The students' clauses:
Maria is the nice girl… (1 student)
Maria is the beautiful girl… (4 students)
Maria is the most pretty girl… (3 students)

The expected sentence:
That is the best film she has ever seen.
The students' sentences:
… better film … (1 student)
… most greatest … (1 student)

IX ERRONEOUS USAGE OF PRONOUNS

POSSESSIVE PRONOUN

1 Erroneous form of the possessive pronoun (1 error all together)
The expected sentence:
She broke her arm.
The student's sentence:
…she's arm. (1 student)

2 Erroneous usage of the possessive pronoun (4 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
She broke her arm.
The students' sentences:
…his arm. (3 students)

The expected clause:
Maria is the most beautiful girl in the/her class…
The students' clauses:
… in his class… (1 student)

INTERROGATIVE PRONOUN

1 Erroneous form of the interrogative pronoun (31 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Whose dog did she find yesterday?
The students' sentences:
Who's dog…? (31 students)

2 Erroneous usage of the interrogative pronoun (10 errors all together)
2.1. The expected sentence:
Whose dog did she find yesterday?
The students' sentences:
Which dog…? (10 students)

PERSONAL PRONOUN

1 Erroneous usage of personal pronoun (5 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
Last summer Tom could not read books in English. Now he can read them.

The students' sentences:
...he can read it. (5 students)

X ERRONEOUS USAGE OF QUANTIFIERS

QUANTIFIER "MUCH"

1 Erroneous usage of a quantifier "much" (30 errors all together)
1.1. The expected sentence:
How much money does John earn?
The students' sentences:
How many money…? (8 students)

1.2. The expected sentence:
How many factories has he got?
The students' sentences:
How much factories…? (22 students)

2 Omission of a quantifier (2 errors all together)
1.1. The expected sentence:
How much money does John earn?
The students' sentences:
How money…? (2 students)

ERRONEOUS USAGE OF QUESTIONS

AUXILIARY VERBS ("TO HAVE" AND "TO DO")
1 Omission of inversion (4 errors all together)
1.1. The expected sentence:
How many factories has he got?
The students' sentences:
...he has got? (4 students)

2 Omission of "do" (47 errors all together)
2.1. The expected sentence:
How many factories does he have?
The students' sentences:
... has he? (6 students)
...have he?(3 students)
...he have? (8 students)
...he has? (6 students)

The expected sentence:
How much money does John earn?
The students' sentences:
How much money John earns? (4 students)

The expected sentence:
Whose dog did she find yesterday?
The students' sentences:
a) ...dog she founded yesterday? (1 student)
b) ...dog she found yesterday? (16 students)

The expected sentence:
Where did you go last Saturday?
The students' sentences:
Where you went…? (3 students)

ERRONEOUS MAIN VERB

1 Erroneous verb form after auxiliary (37 errors all together)
The expected sentence:
How much money does John make/earn?
The students' sentences:
a) ... does John earns? (3 students)
b) ... does John earnd? (1 student)
c) ...does John made? (2 students)

The expected sentence:
How many factories does he have/has he got?
The students' sentences:
...does he has? (5 students)

The expected sentence:
Whose dog did she find yesterday?
The students' sentences:
...dog did she found yesterday? (23 students)

The expected sentence:
Where did you go last Saturday?
The students' sentences:
Where did you went…? (3 students)